

[By Charlie Deitz](#)

Vermont Congressman Peter Welch held an unscripted public forum today at a diner in Bennington. WAMC's Berkshire Bureau Chief Charlie Deitz reports that Welch touched on issues ranging from military activities in the Middle East to government ethics

Jensens Restaurant just north of downtown Bennington was the venue for Congressman Peter Welch's midday visit, 60 or so members of the community, many of them retirees and seniors showed up for lunch and to ask the house representative about pressing issues of the day. Welch opened up by criticizing republicans for targeting social service programs as a way to balance the national budget, a move he says will further hurt state governments.

Welch advocated for ending oil company and ethanol subsidies as well as ending tax cuts for the wealthiest 2 percent of the American populous. Adding to the troubles he says, gas prices are creeping up to unsustainable levels, he and a handful of colleagues are leaning on President Obama to release federal oil reserves, citing multiple successes that strategy has had.

"In fact when President Bush 1 did it prices went down 33 percent."

One resident clamored in complaining that government was ineffective, and unaware of the erosion of the middle class.

"Why can't get a law passed to get the lobbyists out of government?"

Welch, who sits on the committee on oversight and government reform agreed with the disgruntled voter, but said that he's just one of over 400 house members.

The Green Mountain State's lone congressman, who was speaking to a handful of veterans about ways to improve care for returning soldiers, also took time to express his dissatisfaction with the war in Afghanistan, he's criticized the nation's involvement in the war because of rampant corruption at the national and local levels.

As Welch closed down the event, he told one attendee that they are working on bringing rail to the valley.

Welch and his team then made their way to Rutland for an afternoon meeting to discuss how Vermont can get a piece of that 2.4 billion dollar pot that Florida left on the table for high speed rail construction.